

# The Rise, Fall and Resurrection of Traditional Pointing

By Daniel Beckett

In the modern era a cement mixed with hydrated lime has become the standard, unfortunately, for reasons of efficiency and practicality rather than any aesthetic qualities. Using the more rigid and less accommodating cement mortar means that the brickwork can be struck the same day that the bricks are laid. A fairly simple process that leaves no room for the far more refined style of pointing techniques that Mahon Brickwork specialises in. Cement mortar once laid, is resistant to adjustment so sacrifices any notion of eye-catching facades for maximum output.

The driving force behind *Mahon Brickwork* feels that there is no reason why pointing cannot be as attractive as it is practical. As the man himself says: "If you fill a sponge cake with cream it will taste delicious but look unremarkable, if you ice that cake and decorate it, it will look as good as its ingredients taste. Pointing is no different, our expertise, and the use of the right materials can create the same effect, only instead of a cake it's a home."

Nice analogy, but to fully understand the metaphor we have to look a little closer at the subject of materials, after all, surely there are subtle differences between cream or icing and let's say; cement?

Quite simply, it is the selection of traditional materials that is crucial, materials that require patience, skill, and extensive knowledge of traditional brickwork techniques. Mahon Brickwork has assembled a team of experienced pointers, bricklayers and multi-skilled tradesman who have all been subjected to a constantly evolving in-house training and educational scheme.

One method in which Mahon's team receives particularly wide-ranging training is the previously disregarded Tuck style of pointing that is rapidly regaining its popularity.

The TUCK method is most prevalent in Georgian, Edwardian and Victorian architecture. In the 200 or so years following the start of the Georgian period, the high standard of finishing buildings was absolutely paramount in ensuring a sale for the developer. In every corner of London there are period properties that are prime examples of the magnificent standards of workmanship prevalent at the time. TUCK POINTING is a crucial tool in giving such properties their distinctive appearance, pointing is not an exact science and can never be entirely uniform, but TUCK POINTING maintains the illusion of PERFECTION.

However, this period of classical construction was doomed. The onset and aftermath of the First World War put paid to fanciful architectural notions. The devastating loss of life coupled with the sharp economic downturn, meant that social housing was in huge demand, and in that environment; cost is king. The use of cement continued to rise and by the time the 1950s arrived the use of traditional lime mortars and TUCK POINTING, techniques that had been perfected over hundreds of years were unheard of.

The huge number of, what were seen as dilapidated and unwanted Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian buildings were fodder for councils, housing associations and landlords. Subsequently, when TUCK POINTED lime mortar joints needed to be replaced, the cheapest, quickest and least appealing option was used, cement mortar with a mundane and functional diagonal finish.

Such was the popularity of this method that surveyor's specifications insisted that it was used, under pressure to keep costs down, surveyors from the 1950s until present day even specify the ratios to be used: three parts sand to one part cement. This approach led to the introduction of the term *weatherpointing*.

In time this style of pointing became the norm, builders and bricklayers were using cement mortar every working day, trainees and apprentices were schooled in no other method. Before long, the previously favoured techniques had died out and been forgotten. Until now.

Mahon feels that there can be a marriage between the two, modern functionality and classical aesthetics *can* be combined, and Mahon Brickwork has a CATALOGUE of work to prove it. Mahon Brickwork utilises traditional lime mortars ensuring that TUCK, RIBBON/HALF TUCK and FLUSH pointing can be undertaken as it had been for hundreds of years before the First World War.

For purely geographical reasons, London is a brick built city. Large deposits of clay in the ground underneath our capital made brick the obvious material with which to build. So it was that brick became the primary building material for not just London, but cities and towns all over the British Isles.

Over the decades, beautifully presented brickwork has been desecrated by slapdash cement pointing, ill-advised PEBBLEDASHING and unsightly PAINTWORK. Mahon's team of specially recruited and highly-trained employees has made it a personal quest to bring London's architectural history into the public consciousness.

Restored and re-pointed Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian brickwork not only benefits the homeowner, but every single person who calls this city their home.